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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 NIAMEY 000211

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SUBJECT: NIGER: UNDP, DONORS DISCUSS SUPPORT FOR NIGER'S 2009 ELECTIONS, EXPECTED DELAY IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

Ref: a) Niamey 00057, b) 08 Niamey 00727

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**¶11. (SBU) Summary:** During a March 18 meeting for development partners, GON officials, and civil society representatives, discussion focused on the nearly complete voter registration process, the prospect that this and delays in forming the CENI would delay local elections anticipated for June 30, and funding requirements for elections-related purposes. Presidential and parliamentary elections remain planned for November 2009. Development partners expressed desires for direct appeals from the GON for assistance, as well as clarification as to GON budgetary provisions for the elections. End summary.

UNDP Hosts Development Partner and Civil Society Update

**¶12. (U)** On March 18, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Resident Representative Khardiata Lo N'Diaye hosted a donors' meeting to examine a draft electoral assistance document for the 2009 local and general elections in Niger. Charge and Pol Specialist attended the meeting, which included the President of the National Commission to Pilot the Revision of the Voter Register (CNPRFE); the Independent National Electoral Commission's (CENI) Permanent Secretary; the National Council for Political Dialogue's (CNDP) Permanent Secretary; senior advisors from the Government of Niger's (GON) Prime Minister's office and Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, and the Economy and Finance; foreign missions' representatives; and members of civil society.

Voter Registration Process Now in Last Stage

**¶13. (U)** CNPRFE President Moumouni Hamidou assured donors that his commission had started the third and last phase of the voter registration process, i.e., the posting and correction of voter lists in their respective communes. He reported that 6,053,783 voters had been registered and 19,093 polling stations identified nationwide. On February 17, the commission posted voter lists in five of the country's eight regions. On March 2, it started posting lists in the three remaining regions. The last posting took place on March 17 in the urban commune of Agadez. Voters have one month from the posting date to allow for the handling of any objections and adjustments. Once all comments on the lists are handled, the national voter register will be considered complete and official. (Note: Reftels detail the ongoing voter registration process. End note.)

## Voter Register/CENI Formation to Delay Local Elections

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**14.** (SBU) Hamidou said that he expects to submit the new national voter register in May. However, he raised some concerns over the delay in meeting the timeline for local elections, which were anticipated for June 30. In fact, the Electoral Code says that a council of ministers or presidential decree should announce local elections 107 days before the voting date. Because the CNPRFE has yet to submit the voter register and the CENI yet to be established, the GON has not issued such a decree. Hamidou concluded that given that the voter register would not be available until May, it would be "technically" impossible to hold elections in June, so it is incumbent upon the government and the political elite (through the CNDP) to address this problem.

**15.** (SBU) Presidential and parliamentary elections, however, are expected to be held within legal deadlines. After the UNDP meeting, the CNDP Permanent Secretary told the Charge that the CNDP would convene a meeting "very soon" to examine the possibility of requesting an extension until July for local elections to meet the Electoral Code's time limits.

## UNDP Outlines Electoral Assistance Needs

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**16.** (U) Ms. Bossa, UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, made a presentation on the Project to Support Niger's 2009 Electoral Process, which was drafted in November 2008 based on joint consultations and a needs assessment conducted among the UNDP, GON, CNPRFE, CENI Permanent Secretary, and development partners. The project includes a notional budget of \$29.3 m (15.02 billion CFA) for five elections (local, district, regional, legislative, and presidential) for the CENI, the legal authority in charge of

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managing and securing the national voter register, as well as organizing, administering, and supervising electoral and referendum operations.

**17.** (U) The project, which will layer on an unspecified level of GON funding, seeks to provide the CENI with technical assistance to support key areas, including training, sensitization, logistics, and voting operations. The document will also help development partners determine their contributions to the electoral process, as formally requested by the GON via a letter from the Prime Minister to the UNDP Resident Representative. In addition to technical assistance for the CENI, the project will support voter education, political party training, minority group participation, and awareness raising for civil society organizations.

## Development Partners Seek Level of GON Contribution

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**18.** (SBU) GON, development partners, and civil society representatives welcomed this initiative and made various comments to enrich the project document. Despite a GON allocation of 13 billion CFA (USD 26.5 million) in its 2009 budget for elections, most donors wanted to know the exact GON contributions to specific election-related activities. The Ministry of Interior's Director of Political and Legal Affairs indicated that the GON's contribution would be made clear "within a couple of days."

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Comment  
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**19.** (SBU) During a similar meeting in October 2008, the UNDP said donors should not expect any formal requests from the GON for assistance with elections, as this step has already been taken with the tasking of the UNDP to come up with an election assistance plan. Development partner representatives present in the March 18 meeting noted the need for the GON to transmit formal requests to individual embassies or assistance missions. This is necessary so that requests can be advanced to capitals for funding; Charge noted that

16 presidential and/or parliamentary elections were scheduled in sub-Saharan Africa in 2009, perhaps rendering funding a competitive matter among African countries assisted. This concern was reiterated by Charge during a March 25 monthly donors' breakfast, wherein the UNDP Res Rep made a briefer presentation on the upcoming elections. Other donor reps present concurred with the need for further information, including direct appeals from the GON for assistance. End comment.

¶10. (U) Minimize considered.

Whitaker